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ABOUT WEEDS.

BY W. W. BAILEY.

WHAT is a weed? Generally speaking it is any plant that interferes with the operations of agriculture or gardening. Some plants are weeds because by their rapid growth they thrive to the exclusion of better things; others are so, simply from their unsightly appearance and their uselessness. There is never a question in one's mind as to whether a pig-weed (*Chenopodium*) is a weed or not. Its rank and homely growth, its inconspicuous flowers and its very limited uses, at once discard it from the catalogue of desirable plants. So is it with the burdock (*Lappa officinalis*), although this possesses elements of beauty to redeem it. Its large, crumpled leaves spring up in odd corners of yards, about houses, or on dust-heaps where little else would grow, and serve to cover disagreeable objects. The flowers, too, are very pretty, as all young people know who have woven them into parti-colored mats and carpets.

Perhaps weeds meet with less charity than any of God's creations. They are active enemies, not to be despised so much as hated. They are cut down or uprooted wherever found, or, if by chance overlooked, take possession of our entire grounds. So great a pest are they that man has taken them for the type of a rank and rapid growth. Yet, when curiosity leads us to observe them, there is much beauty in these simple plants which we ruthlessly tread beneath our feet. We might learn a useful lesson from the persistency with which they surmount all obstacles and survive every misfortune. The delicacy of taste, also, which leads a few to seek the richest soils or the sunniest exposure is worthy of our praise. And then, how social are they in their habits, forever seeking the improving society of their betters! They take such enjoyment in life, too, frolicking over the meadows, coquetting with their reflections in the brook, or climbing "where the air is delicate" upon the eaves of our houses, where they remind us of Alice Pyncheon's posies.

Many of them, were they only less common, would be highly prized. Indeed, it is at times difficult to draw the line between true flowers and weeds. Think what the dandelion would be were we not accustomed to its golden buttons and feathery globes! Look, too, at the luxuriant growth of the cotton-thistle

(*Onopordon*)! How prodigal is it of its material, as it throws out its silvery leaves and royal tufts of crimson. Those old Caledonian kings were fellows of good taste when they chose this noble plant as the floral symbol of a nation. Armed at every point it stands, like some sturdy Highlander, to repel aggressors.

The corn-cockle (*Lychnis githago*) and the cone-flower (*Rudbeckia hirta*) are both beautiful, as well as the flea-banes (*Erigeron*), daisies (*Leucanthemum*) and St. John's worts (*Hypericum*). Their only fault, and that is sufficient to condemn them, is that they will grow where nobody wants them. Our waste places would be deserts, indeed, did not nature kindly interpose to clothe them with these humble plants. Many species are unmistakably homely, yet even in the least showy there is much of beauty when the microscope is summoned to our aid. Flowers which seem too insignificant to be considered for a moment, will be seen when thus magnified to equal any of their prouder kindred, and to be as strangely and as wisely fashioned.

A weed which is troublesome in one place where the conditions are proper for its rapid extension, need not be so in another where those conditions are not fulfilled. Consequently we find that very different things are called weeds in the different portions of the Union, while some, like the shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) or the purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), are of universal distribution. A plant may have flourished and multiplied in one locality, when if removed to another it will become restricted, and while useless, will no longer be regarded as a weed. The ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) comes to us from Europe, and although very beautiful to look at, is a great nuisance to the farmer: hay-fields in June are often made white with the showy heads of this troublesome plant. On the other hand, some of our weeds, like *Anacharis*, have invaded Europe, and some English weeds are rapidly supplanting the native flora of Australia and New Zealand.

Weeds are variously interesting according as they are viewed. If we keep a garden we will find the purslane an undeniable nuisance, and a vigorous enemy. If, on the other hand, we are indifferent to its invasions, and approach it as a friend, we will find it, together with most other weeds, possessed of beauties of which we had no conception.

We have already spoken of the beauty of the daisy, the bur-

dock, and some of the larger weeds. Let us now look at the smaller flowers, like those of the dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), and any others of the mint family (*Labiatae*). Some of the small *Cruciferae* are also pretty, although they are weedy enough in appearance. The hedge-mustard (*Sisymbrium*) is the most pronounced weed that we know.

The little Veronica which we often find on grass-plats, has a most bewitching flower, which from its minuteness most persons would fail to observe. The corolla is white, and veined with the most delicate pencillings of violet, all pointing towards the center of the flower, so that we here gain beauty and information simultaneously. Its beauty is evident to any observer, but what does it teach? We have said that the colored veinlets all pointed to the center, and this, we believe, is true of all flowers where such markings occur, as shown a long time ago by Sprengel, who claimed that they serve as guides to the insect seeking nectar. Recent observations have proved his theory to be probably correct.

There is no more desirable ground for the beginner, than the waste places and open lots about our cities. Here he will find any number of plants with which it is well to become familiar. They can do no harm where they are, except by circulating their seed, and they are so little regarded by disdainful man that he can claim the whole collection as his own, and receive the municipal thanks for appropriating them. Side by side with the native and European weeds, we will sometimes find the prince's feather (*Polygonum orientale*), the Canary grass (*Phalaris canariensis*) and various other exotics. As the summer advances there will be a perfect tangle of weeds in such a place, evening primroses, *Datura stromonium*, *Lychnis*, melilots white and yellow, Canterbury-bells, amaranths, &c., some showy, others merely coarse and offensive. By the side of the streets we may find the homely cockle-bur (*Xanthium*) or the pretty moth mullen (*Verbascum blattaria*), with a white or yellow corolla, and stamens clothed with violet hairs. The common mullen (*Verbascum thapsus*) we will be sure to find, and if in New England, will meet the autumnal dandelion (*Leontodon autumnale*) which here blooms all summer. It is quite unlike the ordinary dandelion, and has branching green stems, smaller heads, and a tawny pappus. The *Polygonaceæ* present the common smart-weed, the knot-weed,

man's ever-present comrade, and the narrow-dock. More attractive plants are the wood-sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*), with its yellow bells closing as the sun declines, and with its light and graceful leaves, so pleasantly acerb; several species of clover (*Trifolium*) and *lucern* (*Medicago*); the Deptford-pink (*Dianthus armeria*), with its only star, and the celandine (*Chelidonium*).

To those who cannot take long walks, and who yet are interested in nature, we commend these weed gardens which are free to all. They will find a great number of families represented; a great many plans of growth illustrated; many beautiful blossoms, quaint seed-vessels, graceful grasses, and delicious odors, to reward them.

We do not pen these lines in order to save any weed of them all from destruction. The tares must be rooted out or what will become of the wheat? In fact, we are fully conscious that the very next time we see an impudent pig-weed overtopping our favorite marigolds, we will pluck it up root and branch. We merely desire to show that even the poor man may have his botanic garden; that in the words of Lowell:

“A weed is nought but a flower in disguise,
Which is seen through at once if love give a man eyes.”

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RECENT LITERATURE.

WALLACE'S TROPICAL NATURE.¹—The gifted author's long residence in the tropical regions of the old and new world, and his large way of looking at nature, induced by extensive travel and acute observation in both hemispheres, have enabled him to produce a book, which, for the breadth of its views, and interest of its style, must claim a place among those few works in existence of which Humboldt's *Views of Nature* is a type. Wallace's general views, however, of tropical life and nature while fresh, and based on manifold and novel facts, will not perhaps be considered as particularly original to those who have read Humboldt's narratives and essays. Our author accounts for the great richness and variety of the plants and animals of the tropics by the uniformity of the equatorial climate in all parts of the globe. “Over a large portion of the tropics,” he writes, “the same general features prevail, only modified by varying local conditions, whether we are at Singapore or Batavia, in the Moluccas, or New Guinea,

¹ *Tropical Nature and other Essays.* By ALFRED R. WALLACE. London, MacMillan & Co., 1878. 8vo. pp. 356.